



United States Department of Agriculture

## Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

### Investing in Illinois - 2016

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven, locally-led approach to conservation. It offers new opportunities for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to harness innovation, welcome new partners to the conservation mission, and demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation.

In 2016, NRCS is investing up to \$220 million in 84 high-impact projects that impact every state in the nation, including four in Illinois. This investment, which builds on the \$370 invested for 2014 and 2015, will help conservation partners and agricultural producers conserve natural resources, leading to cleaner and more abundant water, healthier soil, enhanced wildlife habitat and many other benefits.

### Improving Oak - Hickory Forest Health in Illinois

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2.3 million (State)

Lead Partner: Illinois Forestry Development Council

Number of Partners: 13

Participating State(s): Illinois

The Illinois Forestry Partnership will address the decline of trees species diversity, specifically the lack of oak regeneration, in Illinois forests. The oak-hickory forest type has been reduced by 16% since 1962 and this reduction will continue if oaks remain underrepresented in the younger age classes. This decline is the result of fire suppression; impacts of exotic/invasive herbs, shrubs, vines and trees; and a lack of applied management strategies to address soil health, water quality, and soil erosion resource concerns on nonindustrial private forest land to restore the appropriate forest cover in the oak-hickory ecosystem. The project will focus on four target areas, covering 37 counties in the State and representing 1.1 million acres of oak-hickory forest type, about half of the remaining ecosystem.

### Improving Working Lands for Monarch Butterflies

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$6 million (National)

Lead Partner: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Number of Partners: 12

Participating State(s): Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas (**lead state**) & Wisconsin

Our partnership will restore, manage and conserve wildlife habitat for monarch butterflies on agricultural and tribal lands using four main strategies: conservation planning and assessment; habitat improvement and best management practices; building an adequate seed supply for milkweed and nectar plants; and, enhancing organizational coordination and capacity. To provide the greatest conservation outcomes, the project will focus work within two NRCS Critical Conservation Areas: Prairie Grasslands Region and Mississippi River Basin. Targeted areas will be identified through a US Geological Survey-led initiative examining fine-scale opportunities for the restoration of milkweed and other pollinator plants. This project will contribute to national goals in terms of habitat and increase the number of monarch butterflies. This in turn will represent the best opportunity to avoid future regulations related to monarch butterflies from being imposed on farmers and ranchers in the future.



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## Midwest Agriculture Water Quality Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$9.5 million (National)

Lead Partner: Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship

Number of Partners: 40

Participating State(s): Illinois, Iowa (**lead state**) & Nebraska

The Midwest Agriculture Water Quality Partnership has assembled over forty partners and \$38 Million in non-federal funds to build an innovative public-private collaboration aimed at advancing a science-based, non-regulatory approach to reducing nutrient loss and improving water quality, soil health and habitat for at-risk species. The partnership has brought together diverse stakeholders from multiple sectors committed to improving water quality in alignment with the goals of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy. The geographic focus is Iowa, Illinois and Nebraska, with an emphasis on priority watersheds within Iowa. This proposal seeks to improve water quality through building bridges among the public, private, agriculture and environmental sectors and rural, urban, point source and non-point source communities as well as all segments of the agricultural supply chain to foster greater collaboration, improved coordination, increased alignment and more effective conservation delivery. This proposal merges traditional approaches to deliver conservation through scaling up conservation planning and conservation practices with a non-traditional, highly innovative precision agriculture platform integration component that will lead to greater practice adoption and improved conservation outcomes.

## Precision Conservation Management

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$5.3 million (CCA)

Lead Partner: Illinois Corn Growers Association

Number of Partners: 30

Participating State(s): Illinois (**lead state**), Iowa & Kentucky

The Precision Conservation Management program (PCM) is an innovative service program designed to apply hard-nosed financial farm business planning with precision conservation technology to provide a blueprint for conservation decision-making. The goal of PCM is to integrate conservation into the foundational farm management of commodity crop operations. PCM will provide financial impact analysis of conservation practices, technical assistance from trained conservation specialists, supplemental privately-funded financial assistance, data-rich assessment tools to guide producers through NRCS program options, and precision conservation technology to enhance effectiveness and minimize risk associated with conservation practices. PCM is dedicated to helping make the Conservation Stewardship Program the flagship program for producers seeking environmental performance linked to economic sustainability. PCM's founding mission is to use farmer

data to serve farmers' interests with specific emphasis on conservation adoption. Upon enrolling in PCM, cooperators create a farm profile using PCM's Farmer Portal, a web interface that quickly, accurately, and securely collects farm data to create a field-by-field inventory of detailed agronomic management practices. After creating farm profiles, PCM specialists offer cooperators a privately-funded incentive to conduct a Resource Analysis and Assessment Plan (RAAP), assessing farm sustainability and identifying natural resource concerns. Using the RAAP, PCM specialists guide cooperators through NRCS program options with a long-term goal of preparing them for the CSP. Finally, cooperators utilize the Conservation Client Gateway to apply for NRCS programs. PCM will succeed in increasing conservation adoption because it approaches conservation from the perspective of the Midwest farmer – protecting business interests while implementing conservation practices that benefit the environment and local communities.

